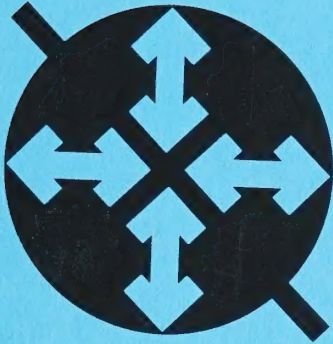




**BLISSYMBOLICS
COMMUNICATION
INTERNATIONAL**

**ANNUAL
REPORT**

1993/94

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BLISSYMBOLICS COMMUNICATION INTERNATIONAL

ANNUAL REPORT 1993-94

This report covers the activities of Blissymbolics Communication International from January 1993 - August 1994. The past year and a half has again reflected a period of change, accomplishment and challenge for BCI.

One of the more significant events was our move in October 1993, to a new office with the Ontario Federation of Cerebral Palsy in their new building in Toronto. We have appreciated our time with The Easter Seal Society and wish to extend our thanks to them for all their assistance to us over the years. We look forward now to our new association with OFCP and want to express our gratitude for their welcome and help to us as we make this transition.

At the time of writing, BCI has had confirmation that funding will be provided by The Ontario Ministry of Economic Development and Trade for the BlissNet Resource Service. This will allow BCI to proceed with a feasibility study on the provision of a variety of services (i.e. tutoring in Bliss, consultation, information dissemination, electronic mail service and general support) via a computer mediated communications system. This service uses BlissNet, a telecommunications package for persons with speech impairments.

Events over the past year have included the second annual *Friends of Bliss* evening, "Remembering The Year That Was 1992-93", on October 21, 1993. The following day, BCI hosted the first Annual BlissUser Conference. Another enjoyable evening was had by all who attended the "Evening of Bliss" boat cruise on Lake Ontario in June 1994.

Over the past year and a half, the Board of Directors has been developing a new strategic plan for our activities in the future. This has resulted in priority being given to user support, as well as a focus on product development, taking advantage of evolving technology. Fundraising is still an area in which we must become more effective.

Challenge has continued to face BCI with the ongoing problem of funding, reduced support staff and smaller office space. However, with continued support from our Board of Directors and dedicated volunteers, we will continue to innovate and respond to the changing needs of Blissymbol users and their instructors around the world.

PERSONNEL

Board of Directors

BCI has continued to receive much appreciated assistance from its Board of Directors (Appendix A) during the past year and a half. They have provided leadership and support for the objectives of BCI and we thank them all for their commitment. The Executive Committee has been particularly active as a result of our reduced staffing.

The Board continues to be responsible for policy matters and determines the directions BCI will pursue. However, the reduced staff complement available to implement these plans and reduced funds have meant that some members of the Board of Directors have undertaken additional tasks and work on behalf of the organization.

We received with regret the resignations of Johan Destrooper, Craig Hoskins, and Lynne Zucker and thank them for their past interest and contributions. We welcomed Paul Marshall, Zvi Gaster and June Wiancko.

At this time, we note with regret that three of our present Directors will not be continuing with us next year: Zvi Gaster, Gwen Mann and Henry Sumi. A special word of thanks to Gwen Mann who also served on the Executive of the Board for her contributions during her two year commitment with us. We wish them all well in their various future endeavours.

Staff

No personnel review would be complete without noting with appreciation the commitment and contribution of our staff (Appendix A). Under present budget constraints, and consequent reduced working hours, they have gone above and beyond the call of duty on behalf of BCI. Katherine Seybold has continued to provide outstanding leadership and coordination to our administration and international activities. Mary Leafe, Cathie Daley, Judy Walker and more recently, Kevin McNaughton and Lee Anne Lippa, have assisted us in a variety of capacities and ways through the period covered by this report and we say a sincere "thank- you" to each of them.

Volunteers/Consultants

BCI continues to benefit from the contributions of a number of consultants and volunteers (Appendix A) and a special note of thanks is extended to those committed people who have helped us in our work in support of Blissymbolics in 1993-94. Their dedication is vital to BCI's accomplishments and is much appreciated.

INTERNATIONAL

BCI holds the exclusive licence for the worldwide rights to use, publish, teach and disseminate Blissymbolics for people with communication, language and learning difficulties. Through formal agreement, BCI grants a sublicense to centres and/or individuals who have a strong interest in Blissymbolics and its applications (Appendix B). BCI affiliate responsibilities include information dissemination, consultation and Blissymbol training.

An international Affiliate meeting will be held in Kerkrade, The Netherlands, October 14-17, 1994 immediately following the ISAAC Biennial Conference in Maastricht. At the time of this writing, sixteen countries will be represented at this three day meeting, during which we will discuss and share ideas and concerns about the present and future of Blissymbolics around the world.

The International Panel (Appendix C) serves as an advisory body to BCI and is comprised of representatives from different countries, language backgrounds and professions who have experience in using or teaching Blissymbolics. Following the last international Bliss meeting in Pottstown, Pennsylvania in August 1992, a new formula for coordinating and reviewing new symbol proposals was introduced. It was recommended that various special interest groups be formed to review proposed symbols and requests for new vocabulary in particular topic areas.

There are now fourteen groups working in such areas as: Leisure and Recreation; Medicine and Paramedical; Music and Performing Arts; Technology; Thinking, Feeling and Knowing; Grammar and Language; Symbols for Young Children; Building, Transport and Geography; Food and Clothing; Advocacy and Law; Religion and Spirituality; Sexuality Symbols; Aging and the Elderly; and Miscellaneous Symbols. The co-ordinators of these groups come from The Netherlands; Hungary; Scotland; the United States; Denmark; Canada; England; Israel; Italy, Australia and Sweden.

A BCI network of Blissymbol Monitors (Appendix D) throughout the world ensures that a standard graphic form of Blissymbols appears in publications, computer software and communication devices. As the development of computer programs proliferates, it is becoming increasingly difficult for BCI to keep informed about all the programs and devices using Blissymbols. More and more, we must rely on our International Panel and Monitors to keep us up to date on Blissymbol developments.

FUNDING

These have been difficult times for the Canadian economy and consequently for the organizations and individuals dependent on it. This, combined with the growing competition for scarce donor dollars and our inexperience in fundraising, has resulted in our efforts to date falling far short of our needs.

The *Friends of Bliss* campaign each fall provides an opportunity for those familiar with Bliss to contribute to BCI on an annual basis.

An "Evening of Bliss" boat cruise, initially planned for the fall of 1993, was held in June, 1994. The objective of the cruise was to raise funds for BCI and to host an event that would increase public awareness of non speaking people in our community, while at the same time, providing an evening of enjoyment for those attending. Thanks to the organization of Christine Adelhart who coordinated the event and the efforts of several board members, BCI was able to cover all the costs of the event. However, while the evening was most enjoyable for those attending, it did not achieve its fundraising goal.

We gratefully acknowledge the past financial support of The Easter Seal Society. We also appreciate assistance in 1993-94 from a number of other sources including:

Special Project funding:

The Bradshaw Trust Foundation

Industry & Science Canada

Hamilton Wentworth Communication Collective

Harmonize For Speech Fund

Ontario Federation of Cerebral Palsy

Pilot Clubs of Ontario

and

generous individuals

The support and interest of these donors is greatly appreciated.

PROJECTS

Projects were undertaken in three areas throughout 1993 and into 1994:

1. Support to Blissymbol users in Ontario
2. Special events for Blissymbol users and their supporters
3. Technological development and support

1. Support to Blissymbol users.

(a) An eight-week Bliss Support Program was developed by Karen Luker, M.H.Sc., SLP(C) for Blissusers in the Ottawa region (January-March, 1994). The program consisted of an informal needs survey, identification of four individuals who could benefit from a short support program, service provision, documentation of the service activities and evaluation of the program. The funding for the program was provided by BCI from funding from the Bradshaw foundation. (See Appendix E)

(b) An ongoing literacy support service has been provided to one Bliss user in the Halton region as an interim program during the period between school graduation and the initiation of community adult literacy services. The support program has been planned and supervised by Sherri Parkins and Paul Marshall, BCI Board member, has volunteered his time to provide weekly tutoring sessions. This support program has been possible, as well, through funding from the Bradshaw Foundation.

(c) The Ontario Federation of Cerebral Palsy has offered space adjacent to the BCI office for a Resource Library to house the materials previously displayed in the Easter Seal Communication Institute Resource Centre. During the fall of 1994, this service is being implemented, supported by Blissymbol experienced AAC users who will provide information about the materials.

2. Special events for Blissymbol users and their supporters

(a) Following on the successful 1992 "Friends of Bliss" evening, which celebrated Twenty-One Years of Bliss, a second "Friends of Bliss" evening was held in October, 1993. The venue was the Meeting Room at the Ontario Federation for Cerebral Palsy, 1630 Lawrence Ave. West - the new location for the office of BCI. The theme was "Remembering the Year that Was, 1992-1993, and Bliss users were invited to send an account of a special event in their life that had occurred in the past year. It was a memorable occasion with lots of time for fellowship and an excellent musical performance by an East York Barbershoppers quartet, "Three and-a-Half Notes".

(b) The day following the "Friends of Bliss" evening, the first Bliss Users Conference was held in the same location. It was organized by Bliss users for Bliss users and featured panel discussions and discussion groups. The keynote presenters were Nola Millin and Paul Marshall. The theme for the conference was Advocating for BlissUsers and Blissymbolics. Recommendations coming out of the conference included a longer conference for 1994 and the need for a Bliss Retreat.

Plans are well underway for the second BlissUsers conference to be held at OFCP on Friday, November 4 following the third annual Friends of Bliss Evening.

3. Technological development and support

(a) In the spring of 1994, the software developed by Russell Galvin for BCI, using HyperCard — *AccessBliss*, *StoryBliss*, and *AccessBlissboard* — was upgraded to make the software independent of different versions of HyperCard. This was done in order to reduce the problems that users would have as they changed computers or upgraded their systems or as HyperCard changed.

(b) The major project during 1993-1994 has been BlissNet. This telecommunications package for use by persons who use Blissymbols and those who wish to communicate with them was originally developed by the IDON Corporation of Ottawa beginning in 1985. Up to September, 1993, the original development and field testing of BlissNet-1 was supported by the Department of Communications, known now as Industry Canada. Effective October, 1993, a project for the development of BlissNet-2 was approved by Industry Canada. This project is due for completion in October, 1994.

During the period October, 1993 to the time of this report (September, 1994), BCI has supported the implementation of BlissNet-1. As of August, 1994, there are 36 subscribers to BlissNet and the average number of calls per day, were 4.06. For a report of the status of BlissNet, August, 1994, see Appendix F.

As BlissNet-2 becomes ready for use, field trials are being initiated and plans are underway for the beginning of the project entitled, "Assessing the Feasibility of Using Computer Mediated Communications (CMC) to Resource the Communicatively Impaired Population", funded by the Ontario Network Infrastructure Program (ONIP). This project will provide a variety of services to include tutoring in Blissymbolics and traditional orthography, consultation, communication, information dissemination, project announcements, electronic mail service, instructional support, and general support relating to Blissymbol use. The service will be supported primarily by trainers/technology specialists and consumer coordinators in five regions of Ontario working with Drew McNamara, John Dowling and Kari Harrington, the Toronto staff team members for the earlier version of BlissNet. This project is scheduled to begin November, 1994.

APPENDIX A

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Betty Layton	Louis Lazonick
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Peter Reich	Paula Stanovich
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Bob McNaughton	Bob Gibbons
Rosemary Marshall	Nola Millin
Christine Adelhardt	Sherri Parkins



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APPENDIX E

Abstracts from Bliss Support Program
Ottawa Region Report

prepared by

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for

Blissymbolics Communication International
March 15, 1994.

The Bliss Support Program which was developed under the current mandate consisted of an 8-week program addressing the needs of four Bliss users in the Ottawa-Carleton region. The following discussion reports on:

- a) Bliss-user selection rationale
- b) objectives for the 8-week period
- c) procedures undertaken and accomplishments
- d) evaluation of service
- e) recommendations

Furthermore, a description of the service delivery model for the pilot project (and relevant recommendations) will be presented.

Bliss-User Selection Rationale

An informal needs survey covering 11 agencies and 6 Speech-Language Pathologists was conducted in the Ottawa-Carlton region prior to commencing the project. Through this survey, individual Bliss users were identified and selected according to three main criteria: (a) perceived need (via user, caregivers and professionals involved); (b) potential for progress; (c) resources currently available to the user. Also, an attempt was made to obtain a representative sample of needs, that is it was hoped that a "cross-section" of the Bliss population could be included) e.g., Bliss user with literacy needs, Bliss user requiring basic training or refresher, Bliss user requiring a new board, etc.) Given the time frame for the project, four current Bliss users were therefore selected as candidates. All are individuals in the 30 to 50 year range who have been using Bliss as their primary mode of communication for a short or long period of time.

Objectives

Objectives for the 8-week project were identified as follows:

- 1) select appropriate candidates;
- 2) develop a service which will address users' individual needs in a cost-effective manner, using resources currently available;
- 3) maintain regular contact with Speech-Language-Pathologist and/or other professionals involved with each user;
- 4) document and report on progress.

Long-term goals for each candidate were determined via discussions with users, caregivers, and professionals. From these, a list of short-term objectives was drafted for the 8-week project.

Evaluation of Service

Evaluation of the service has been undertaken including three populations:

- a) Bliss users
- b) caregivers and professionals
- c) service providers

Each user was polled directly and asked a series of questions (e.g. general impressions, recommendations for future, interest in continuing service, etc). Caregivers and professionals were asked similar questions.

From the users' point of view, the overall impression was that this is a very worthwhile service. They were unanimous in suggesting that the working group meet more than once per week (one user proposed daily meetings!) and for longer durations (e.i., more than 2 hours at one time). Although this would likely not be feasible, it was certainly nice to hear that they were so motivated! A common recommendation was that we provide "homework" which could be completed between meetings. All users were interested in resuming activities should the service be offered again. Most showed a preference for one-to-one-work, however all expressed interest in having some group activities as well.

Caregivers and professionals were overwhelmingly in support of this service even prior to the project commencing. During the process of identifying candidates for the pilot study, many expressed how "desperate" they were to receive any assistance which was available. Offers of letters of support for funding abounded (and are available upon request). Of particular interest to them was having someone available to take on some of the crucial follow-up and support work for which they usually lack the time. Also, a few individuals mentioned the necessity to have a "specialist" in the region who can act as a resource person. Most of the professionals and caregivers involved do not work with a great number of Bliss users and expressed a lack of comfort in providing an adequate service.

From the group leader' point of view, it is felt that this service is valuable. The flexibility in offering individual or group services was of interest. The group format was particularly helpful in that it provided opportunities for both users and leaders that would otherwise be absent in an individual session. Our ability to serve a greater number of users at once was an obvious benefit. As noted previously, interaction between users was evident and beneficial. Also, leaders were able to provide each other with support and engage in "on-the-spot" trouble-shooting and problem-solving given their varying experience and knowledge of users. For example, Treena proved to be a valuable resource in providing information about the users (e.g. attention span, switch placement, etc.) Finally, users were given the opportunity to observe other users and leaders modelling the use of vocabulary or strategies during each session.

There was a strong sense from all parties involved that although the time frame for the pilot project was clearly specified prior to commencing, the service seemed to have lasted a very short time. Due to the nature and slower pace of communication in AAC, everyone (including group leaders) felt that we were "just getting the ball rolling". It is not surprising, therefore, that all feel there is still much work to be done.

Service Delivery Model

As mentioned above, several individuals were involved in providing the service in question. The Speech-Language-Pathologist was involved in coordinating the project, identifying and assessing candidates, documenting needs and goals, supervising the work of the two assistants, and leading the working group.

The Communication Disorders Assistant was responsible for leading a portion of the working group (e.g. carrying out individual tasks with a user) and ran the group independently for one week. She was also responsible for the preparation of materials for the group and the individual client (user 3).

The Bliss user assisted with the working group by supervising the work of one Bliss user at any one time. She was also involved in the preparation of a few materials.

A volunteer participated in the construction of the Blissboard for user 3.

The proposed model proved to be an efficient way of delivering services for a variety of responses. Firstly, users were challenged by having to communicate with more than one leader, one of whom was non-verbal. Secondly, the model allows for a more cost-effective provision of service by involving individuals with different types of knowledge. For example, the majority of materials preparation was carried out by the Communication Disorders Assistant.

Because the initial project required much indirect involvement by the Speech-Language Pathologist (i.e., initial set-up and coordination, report writing), it is estimated that a future program would be even more cost effective (for a more in-depth discussion of this issue, see recommendations below).

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made as a result of the project:

- 1) the Bliss support program should continue to address **individual** needs insofar as resources allow it;
- 2) Bliss users should be considered for inclusion in the working group or for individual intervention as appropriate;
- 3) the Bliss support program should address the needs of **all** ages of users and potential users, and effort should be made to include them in the program;
- 4) the Speech-Language Pathologist should maintain regular contact with caregivers and professionals in order to ensure appropriateness of goals and carryover into other environments;
- 5) the Speech-Language Pathologist should maintain an awareness of services being provided in the region to avoid duplication of services;
- 6) because demand for services is expected to exceed resources, criteria should be outlined for inclusion in the service (e.g. selection of candidates; "schedule" of services, e.g.. run weekly groups, however users attend on alternate weeks);
- 7) inclusion of a greater number of volunteers in the preparation of materials and delivery of service would help reduce costs further (e.g. volunteers could be involved in carrying out drill work during one-on-one time);
- 8) the Communication Disorders Assistant could be given more responsibility for leading the working group given that (a) her level of competence and comfort with the population are superior, and (b) progress from week-to-week does not require the constant reassessment and input of the Speech-Language Pathologist;
- 9) a small "library" of materials should be developed in order to assist with sessions. A portion of funding could perhaps be set aside for this (e.g. obtaining flash cards).

Appendix F

Project Title: Communicating, Learning, and Working with BlissNet

**Principal Researcher: Shirley McNaughton C.M. M.Ed.
Blissymbolics Communication International**

Project Coordinator/Trainer: Andrew McNamara M.A.

Interim Report

BlissNet is a telecommunications package for use by persons with speech impairments. This software package was developed by the IDON Corporation of Ottawa, Canada. Blissymbolics Communication International is sponsoring a Field Trial of the software under the Project Title, Communicating, Learning, and Working with BlissNet. The purpose of the project is (1) to demonstrate the application and consumer management of BlissNet, (2) to provide a model for the use of the electronic mail function of BlissNet in major cities across Canada with outreach to those within their surrounding geographic regions, and (3) to provide an experiential and knowledge resource for the development of a training program by BCI.

The Project provides (a) tutoring in the use of computer-based telephone communication, (b) facilitation of communicative interactions between the participants, (c) tutoring toward the use of traditional orthography for computer-based communication, (d) tutoring in the use of Blissymbolics, and (e) vocational training for the four consumers involved in the management and training components of the Project. The following is a brief report of progress to date on the Project.

Electronic Mail Service Start Date:

The electronic mail service (EMS) went on-line on November 7, 1992. The EMS uses a software package entitled Chairman. The EMS is housed in the residence of one of the consumer personnel (John Dowling). John is responsible for monitoring and troubleshooting the EMS system.

Subscribers

As of August 15, 1994, there were thirty-six subscribers to BlissNet. Of this number, twenty-four have used the EMS over the past 12 months and thirteen of these users can be described as "regular Users", i.e. one or more times per month. Eight of the regular users are persons with speech impairments (CMJ, JOE, ED, MRO, NHM, PM) with two of these individuals being Project Consumer Personnel (JRD, KAH) and one user (CBS) is actually a classroom for individuals with developmental handicaps in Ottawa. The other regular users are either Project staff or consultants.

In terms of geographic location, three of the users live in St. John's, Newfoundland, one in Sherbrooke, Quebec, two live in Ottawa, Ontario, one lives in Markham, Ontario, one in Hamilton, Ontario, one in Milton, Ontario, one in Kitchener, Ontario, one in Burlington, Ontario, and the

remainder live in Toronto, Ontario.

Frequency of Usage

The frequency of usage and is as follows:

	Av. No. of Calls Per Day
January 1994	4.58
February	5.68
March	3.94
April	2.77
May	2.49
June	0.37*
July	4.06

(* The EMS was down for three weeks due to technical difficulties.)

Progress Related to Goals

(a) Tutoring in the use of computer-based telecommunication

Tutoring in telecommunication use has not been a primary need to date. This has resulted primarily from the selection process for participants. Initial participants were selected for their familiarity with computers and/or computer-based telecommunications. Other new users participated in a four week training programme last summer sponsored by BCI.

(b) Facilitation of communicative interactions between participants

The frequency and dispersion of usage over the past seven months is fairly stable. Most users have been conversing with others with whom they have a previous relationship.

Unfortunately, group discussions have developed at times but have not been sustainable to date. Despite the difficulties associated with maintaining group discussions, there remains a strong interest in this interaction format. However, there are two potential contributing factors to the dearth of this type of activity: (a) the BlissNet software and (b) familiarity with telecommunication systems. Both of these factors have been addressed with the new version of the software, BlissNet Two.

Approximately one-third of the way through the Project, an "800" number for the electronic mail system was obtained. This additional expense has seemed to have removed any hesitation regarding use of the system by those needing to call long distance. This number also allows for our easy expansion across the country.

(c) Tutoring toward the use of traditional orthography for computer-based telephone communication

Progress on this goal is very hard to evaluate. Again, this is related to the frequency and diversity of usage of the system. However, the system is well prepared to provide this function. Kari Harrington, the Consumer responsible for this function, has previous experience as a tutor. Unfortunately, Kari's skills have not been used to date.

Kari has established a protocol for message construction that may facilitate the development of traditional orthography skills. Kari's messages are constructed such that the message appears in Blissymbol without Gloss first and then is immediately followed by the traditional orthographic version. The benefit of this approach is that the Bliss user can quickly and easily read the message in Bliss and then work back and forth between the Blissymbol and traditional orthographic versions to learn both the words and the syntax. Feedback to date on this approach has been quite positive.

(d) Tutoring in the Use of Blissymbolics

Treena Guy (Ottawa) has been the person responsible for this function. Treena has been working with individuals with developmental handicaps in a classroom in Ottawa. She works with the students in person and via BlissNet. Paul Marshall of Binbrook has provided tutoring to a user in Burlington using a similar approach.

(e) Vocational training for the Consumer Personnel

Vocational training for the Consumer Personnel is a very important component of this Project. Progress on this goal to date has varied with the individual. John Dowling, the EMS operator, has had many opportunities to learn his system related duties and has done so quite well. Kari Harrington (Traditional Orthography Tutor) and Treena Guy (Blissymbol Tutor) have had fewer opportunities to perform their system-related duties. Kari has been an avid user of the system and her frequency of use and dedication to the goals of the Project has contributed greatly to the increased usage.

Project Coordinator's Role

As the Project Coordinator/Trainer for the Project, I perform several functions. At the present time, I am responsible for software installation, user training, troubleshooting around hardware and software related problems, and system management. In addition, I am involved in public relations for the Project, fund raising, liaising with government and private sector interests, and research related to the use of CMC and Blissymbolics.

Conclusions

In general, the Project has been extremely successful. The regular users of the system are very

enthusiastic and dedicated to its continuation. During the first year of the Project, the number of users has increased monthly and the frequency of usage has showed an increasing trend. This trend has slowed down over the past six to eight months. Use of the system is likely to increase once the new, more user friendly version of BlissNet is available. In addition, the development of a marketing initiative would be an important step in the proliferation and advancement of CMC at this time.

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Project Coordinator/
Trainer

